



HAVE PDA, WILL TRAVEL

If the weight of all your essential holiday items causes problems, Alan Docherty has the answer. Your PDA can carry all the maps, books, journals, language programs and internet access you'll need

Your computer and the web can really help when planning and booking a holiday or business trip, but what about when you're ready to set off? One thing you shouldn't leave at home is your trusty PDA.

Handheld PCs are reasonably cheap, extremely lightweight and can make your travels go far more smoothly.

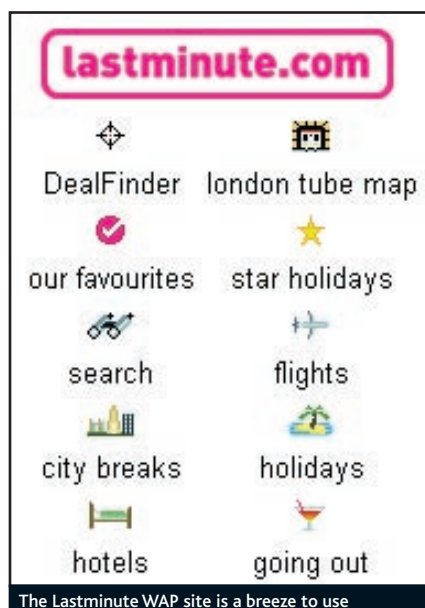
The last thing you want is to be laden with unnecessary luggage, and this is where your handheld comes to the rescue. It makes an easy replacement for a CD player, paper maps, diary, camera, travel journal and foreign language phrasebooks. You don't even need to lug around that hardback copy of Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. It can all go on your handheld computer.

A PDA does a lot more than help lighten the load of your luggage. It can contain a raft of travel-specific software available that will make your trip more enjoyable. It may even impress your partner who couldn't quite believe it when they found you'd spent £200 on yet another gadget.

Before you head off, though, you'll need to spend a little time preparing your PDA for its trip. There's some software that may already be on your handheld, and there's some that you'll have to download. But with our help, you will be carrying a lot less baggage on your next expedition – and you'll be getting a whole lot more out of it.

INSIDE INFORMATION

There's no need to take an alarm clock with you. Perhaps you've booked a scuba diving expedition starting at 5am, or you're waiting for a connecting flight 20 hours into your journey. If so, simply set your PDA's alarm clock to keep you on schedule. Handhelds don't just tell the time of your current location. Many clock programs include functions that give the time in different destinations, so



international travellers can check the time in their home country as well as at their destination. This is useful when calling home, and it also helps prepare your body clock for life in a new time zone.

Don't forget to update your address book with the names and addresses of everyone to whom you want to send a postcard back home. A calculator programme comes in handy for currency conversions. The word processor or memo function can be used to record notes about your holiday, including travel and accommodation details. Before you set off, create the documents in a format your PDA can read and sync the file to your PDA's memory.

You could also use the word processor function as a travel journal to record the memorable moments of your trip. Some PDAs

come with digital cameras, too. Although these aren't as good as even a cheap dedicated digital camera, they will take a few snaps and won't cost an extra ounce of weight.

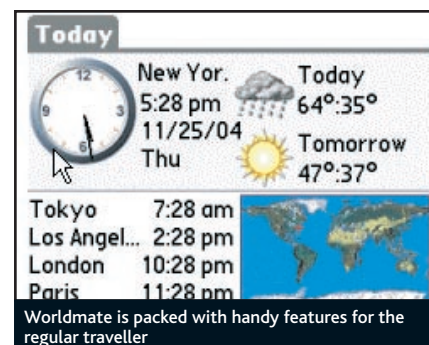
Most PDAs come with music players, too, and with a high-capacity storage card you can carry dozens of CDs' worth of music. You could even brush up on your language skills with MP3 files of foreign language lessons.

CARRIED AWAY

Many PDAs come with a handful of games to while away the hours, but a far wider selection can be downloaded at sites such as www.handango.co.uk. Here, you'll find classics such as chess, Scrabble and backgammon as well as current favourites such as Zuma.

You can also catch up with some reading on your trip. The volunteers at Project Gutenberg have assembled the largest single collection of free electronic books – 15,000 in all – and they're all available for free and legal download at www.gutenberg.org. Once downloaded, all you have to do is create a blank document that your PDA can read, and cut and paste the text from Project Gutenberg into the document before syncing it.

More recent publications can be downloaded from a range of sites. Try eBooks (www.ebooks.com), which currently sells *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* for considerably less than the paper versions. You don't even have to rely on the Bible being in your hotel room; you can download a free copy from www.olivetree.com.



Worldmate is packed with handy features for the regular traveller

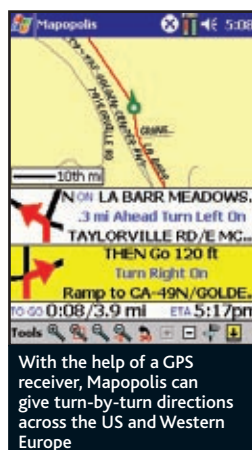


There are also plenty of specialist programs that are designed specifically for the traveller. WorldMate (www.mobimate.com) runs on several platforms and is a comprehensive program for travellers with a smart, easy-to-use interface. The Standard Edition (\$35, around £19) comes with dozens of functions, including weather forecasts for 38,000 cities, a currency converter for 163 currencies, a clock that covers five different time zones at once, a travel itinerary manager and a packing list organiser. It even calculates tips for different services including taxis, restaurants and hotel porters, taking into account the different tipping practices across the world.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

There are many translation guides available for download. The Beiks translation series comes in 23 foreign languages and a wide range of different formats: mono-direction, bi-directional, talking phrasebooks and standard phrasebooks. You can download a trial version from www.beiks.com.

Electronic maps stored on a PDA are much neater than the paper variety. Mapopolis (\$35 from www.mapopolis.com) is a superb piece of mapping software, with versions covering the US and much of Western Europe. The entire set of maps is huge – the UK and France amounts to almost 500MB – but you can just put those you need on your PDA as you need them. Once the map is installed, you can use your stylus to scroll it across the screen. A



zoom function helps you to get in close and a find function helps locate addresses and streets.

Mapopolis can also plan a route between two addresses, while the Navigator versions (\$100, around £55, for North America; \$125, around £69, for Western Europe) give spoken and visual prompts before each turn when used with a global positioning satellite (GPS) receiver. Nine days' use is provided with the free demo.

SURF'S UP

There are even more possibilities with a general packet radio services (GPRS)-capable PDA, or one that works with your GPRS phone. You'll already know the convenience of being able to surf the net while you're on the move, so you'll be able to use it to find last-minute bargain hotel rooms, weather forecasts and information about local events. If

you use a digital photo from your PDA or digital camera, you can also send an electronic postcard home.

To make GPRS data calls abroad, your phone must support the frequencies used in that country. A quad-band phone should work anywhere. You'll also need GPRS roaming enabled on your tariff. O2, Vodafone, T-Mobile, Virgin Mobile and Orange all offer GPRS in more than 60 countries. The Virgin Mobile

Pay-As-You-Go tariff is limited to 34 countries excluding the USA, Australia, India and Thailand. GPRS roaming costs vary from the O2 Data 5 tariff at £8 per month for 5MB GPRS usage to £25 per MB for some countries on Orange. Contact your phone network to check the costs on your tariff before you set off, and whether GPRS roaming needs to be activated.

WAP sites' simple, graphics-light pages make them faster and cheaper to browse than the normal web versions. Weather Online has a WAP site at <http://wap.weatheronline.co.uk> that provides weather forecasts for up to six days across the world. The Lonely Planet WAP site (<http://wap.lonelyplanet.com>) contains a world guide with information and advice on visiting 22 countries, recommendations on when to visit, where to eat, what to see and some good tips on where to stay off the usual tourist track. The Lastminute WAP site (<http://mobile.lastminute.com>) gives information about flights, city breaks, hotels, day trips, sports events and places to eat.

BEFORE YOU GO

Given all the information and entertainment on your handheld, you really should take some precautions to ensure it doesn't disappear. Don't forget your charger and make sure that you have the necessary adaptor to fit the local power supply outlet. You can pick these up at the airport. Also check that your charger works at the local mains voltage. This should be written on the charger itself; if you see the words 100-240V you can use it

anywhere. Those that are limited to 220-240V won't work in North America, Japan and various other countries with a mains voltage of around 110V. You can find a full breakdown of countries' voltages at www.globtek.com/world-mains-voltages.html.

Like most electronic devices, PDAs don't mix well with water, sand or mud, so if you're going on an active or beach holiday, it's a good idea to get a case for your PDA. Proporta (www.proporta.com) stocks a wide range, including plastic waterproof wallets and aluminium clamshell cases, with prices starting at around £15.

As always, you shouldn't advertise your PDA to potential muggers. However, if it is lost or stolen, it won't be such a disaster if you've backed up all your important data to your PC before you go. Equally, bring a backup paper copy of any information that's critical to your trip. You should also protect sensitive data with a strong password.

Finally, remember that your PDA is there to make your trip easier and more enjoyable, not to consume your entire time, so turn it off occasionally so you can appreciate your surroundings. 

ROUGH GUIDE'S DIGITAL MAPS

The Rough Guide experts have done a fine job of bringing together their travel knowledge into a PDA application. The Digital Maps (£12 from www.roughguides.com/mobile) are PDA versions of its city guide maps, available for Pocket PC, Palm or Sony Ericsson P800/P900. They are easy to use and are currently available for 10 cities including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Dublin, New York and Paris.

Each guide consists of a collection of high-quality maps that you can scroll around or zoom in and out. Tapping on a point of interest brings up additional information, such as opening times or historical



details. There's a powerful search function for finding specific tourist spots, cultural attractions and restaurants, and links are available to find out more about a particular location. The Things Not to Miss section offers a round-up of must-see highlights, with pictures and links to the best attractions, which in turn link to maps and additional information.

For those hankering after a full dose of Rough Guide information, there are e-book versions of the full guidebooks. These cost a mere £2.99, a £12 saving on the paper versions.

However, while they are currently only available for 20 destinations, there are 188 Rough Guide books.